

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as we rapidly approach the end of the session, Senators are working in earnest to finish a bipartisan government funding bill as well as an emergency Federal relief package.

Over the past several weeks, the bipartisan Gang of 8 came together to provide a framework for an agreement on emergency COVID relief. That framework has been the basis of discussions between the four congressional leaders: Speaker PELOSI, Leader MCCARTHY, Leader MCCONNELL, and myself. Secretary Mnuchin has been in our talks as well, representing the President.

Yesterday we had two very long and very productive meetings. Our final discussion stretched late into the evening.

As we race the clock to reach a final accord before the end of the year, we are close to an agreement. It is not a done deal yet, but we are very close.

Now, for Democrats, this has always been about getting the American people the relief they need in the time of an acute national crisis, of an emergency to so many Americans. This has been about delivering a lifeline to Americans who were laid off, through no fault of their own, families struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table, small businesses hanging on for dear life.

This has been about saving our schools, our healthcare system, and delivering the resources to produce and distribute the vaccine that should finally, finally help our country turn the corner and defeat this evil disease.

We are on the precipice of achieving these goals. We Democrats would have liked to go considerably further, but this won't be the last time Congress speaks on COVID relief. Right now, we must address this emergency over the short term. But make no mistake, we will work in the future to provide additional relief as the country requires, but we need to provide a platform to build on. We need to address this emergency right now.

At the end of one of the most difficult years in recent American history, a vaccine has given us all a reason for hope. Let's give the country another reason. The finish line is in sight. Everyone wants to get this done. Let's push through the few final meters and deliver the outcome that the American people very much need.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Katherine A. Crytzer, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

TECHNOLOGY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon, the Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet held our final hearing of the 116th Congress. The title of yesterday's hearing was "Betting on the Rest: Expanding American Entrepreneurship Outside Traditional Hubs," and it focused on examining where venture capital is being invested in this country and where it is not, with an eye to exploring ways to expand investment to other parts of the country.

Over the past 50 years, venture capital has come to play an essential role in advancing American entrepreneurship. Venture capitalists have provided key funding for startups that have gone on to become some of America's most profitable companies. Many of the technologies and services we rely on today would not be around if venture capitalists hadn't been willing to take a risk on innovation.

However, venture capital investment in the United States has traditionally been highly concentrated in certain areas of the country. In 2019, California-based companies received 50 percent of all venture-backed investment in the United States. Just three States—California, New York, and Massachusetts—accounted for almost 75 percent of all venture-backed investment in the country.

There are a lot of valid reasons for this investment concentration. However, this geographic imbalance also means that a majority of regions within the United States are often shut out from the kind of investment that creates jobs, revitalizes communities, and enables the pursuit of the American dream.

Without greater access to capital in underserved regions, the flow of talent,

wealth, and opportunity will continue to move to only a handful of coastal cities, and the full reach and diversity of American ingenuity will go unrealized. Fortunately, there are a lot of individuals in the private sector who are already working to address this issue and expand venture-backed investment to other areas of the United States, and we had the opportunity to hear from some of them yesterday. I was very grateful for their input. We were very pleased to have a South Dakota entrepreneur among our panelists.

I am committed to making sure that the Federal Government serves as a help, not a hindrance, to the expansion of venture capital investment. I took the reins of the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet at the start of the 116th Congress, and I am very proud of the work we have done over the past 2 years. We have had a very active Congress, holding eight hearings in Washington, DC, as well as a hearing in my home State of South Dakota. These hearings have explored everything from broadband investment in rural America to the way the social media companies filter information on their platforms.

I have introduced several bills over the past 2 years that have been informed by our work at the committee, including the PACT Act, the TRACED Act, the Telecommunications Skilled Workforce Act, and the STREAMLINE Small Cell Deployment Act.

A priority of mine over the past several years has been ensuring that America stays at the head of the next wave of internet technology, which is 5G. In addition to the tremendous technological benefits that will result from 5G, staying at the forefront of the 5G revolution will bring tremendous economic investment and create a lot of great American jobs.

I spent a lot of time working on this issue when I was chairman of the Commerce Committee, and heading up the Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet Subcommittee in this Congress has allowed me to continue to focus on 5G.

Last year, I introduced the STREAMLINE Small Cell Deployment Act along with the ranking member of the subcommittee, Senator SCHATZ. Our legislation would help expedite the deployment of the small cells that are a key part of 5G infrastructure.

This year, I introduced the Telecommunications Skilled Workforce Act to address another part of the 5G equation, and that is ensuring that we have the workforce in place to handle the demands of installing and maintaining 5G technology.

As a resident of a rural State, ensuring access to broadband internet in rural communities has long been a priority of mine. I introduced legislation this year to direct funds from radio spectrum auctions to expand rural broadband access. I am continuing my work to ensure that rural communities get access to 5G technology.

Now, 5G has the potential to offer tremendous benefits to rural communities, from expanded access to telehealth services to precision agriculture technologies, and I am committed to ensuring that rural communities are not left behind in the 5G revolution.

Pretty much every American has been forced to deal with annoying and illegal robocalls. These calls are a major nuisance, and too often, they are more than a nuisance. Every day, vulnerable Americans fall prey to even more sophisticated scammers and have money or their identities stolen.

I have worked on this issue for years, and in 2019 I introduced the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence Act, or the TRACED Act, along with Senator MARKEY. While this legislation won't stop every robocall, the TRACED Act provides tools to discourage illegal robocalls, protect consumers, and crack down on offenders. I am very proud that last December, the President signed our legislation into law.

More and more, Americans get news and information from social media sites, and particularly during this past election cycle, a lot of questions have arisen about the ways that social media platforms are filtering the information that we see. Internet platforms have actively cultivated the notion that they are merely providing the technology for people to communicate and to share their thoughts and ideas, but the reality is somewhat different. Sites like Facebook and Twitter make use of sophisticated content-moderation tools, algorithms, and recommendation engines to shape the content that we see on these platforms.

Now, content moderation can certainly improve the user experience. Most of us would prefer that YouTube recommend videos that match our interest. The problem is, the content moderation has been and largely continues to be a black box, with consumers having little or no idea how the information they see has been shaped by the sites they are visiting.

Last year, I chaired a subcommittee hearing on this issue, and the information we gathered helped inform two pieces of bipartisan legislation that I introduced this Congress—the Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, or the PACT Act. Both of these bills would increase transparency around the content-moderation process so that users have a better sense of how the information presented to them is being filtered. The Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the PACT Act go a long way toward making social media and other sites more accountable to consumers, and I will continue to work to advance these legislative efforts here in the Senate.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to chair this subcommittee over the past Congress and for the opportunity it has given me to work on the important issues and the legislation

that I have mentioned. I want to thank the subcommittee's ranking member, Senator SCHATZ, for all the work he has done to make our committee so effective. I look forward to continuing to work with all my subcommittee colleagues to advance the 5G revolution, address the challenges presented by the internet age, and to make life better for the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2828

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in a moment, I am going to make a unanimous consent request on a piece of legislation on which my Eastern Oregon constituents have done an extraordinary job with respect to building a coalition that brings people together on a contentious issue. It deserves enormous credit, and I will describe their efforts here shortly.

I also want to thank, as we begin, Senator BARRASSO. Senator BARRASSO will be taking on a new role in January on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. He and I have worked together often, and I have appreciated his talking with me on this matter as he begins to look to his new duties in January.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2828, the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I do appreciate the work the Senator from Oregon has done on this public lands bill. I know the amount of effort that has gone into this legislation is significant. Locally driven public lands bills take an incredible amount of time to get right.

This legislation has gone through intensive local stakeholder involvement, very similar to what we have done in Wyoming with the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative in my home State. The Wyoming Public Lands Initiative was spearheaded by our Wyoming County Commissioners Association. This initiative was started in order to resolve, through local negotiations, the status of so-called “temporary” wilderness study areas in Wyoming that have now, seemingly, become permanent.

I recognize and understand that public lands negotiations often result in

compromise. This give-and-take is a good thing, for it lets people closest to the issue have a significant voice. So I appreciate the efforts the stakeholders on the ground in Oregon have made to get this bill to where it is today. However, I believe additional work is still needed.

I would let my friend from Oregon know that I will work with him and any other Senators with public lands issues before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. We may not always agree on a given outcome, but I am committed to having those discussions with Members of this body.

For this reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I know my colleague does have other business that he has to get to, but before he attends to that, I just want to thank him for spending time with me already on this issue. I am going to outline the extraordinary effort that was made by my constituents.

I think we all know—and I am going to discuss it—that in the West, very often, citizens feel nobody is listening to them, that nobody cares about them. The Senator and I have talked about this. This is kind of a question of, How do you empower them with a framework that can help them but also serve as a model for the country?

So a big thanks to my colleague, and I am looking forward to working with him on this and other matters next year.

What Senator BARRASSO and I are discussing is the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act, known in our part of the county as the Malheur CEO Act. The bill has been in the works since late 2018. Back then, when a group of ranchers and business people who live in Malheur County, OR, came to see me, they came to talk about this incredible part of Oregon they call home. It is wide open country, and not many people live there, but those who do want to make sure they have a say in how it is going to be preserved and managed for the future.

When I say this bill has been in the works since 2018, that is not the whole story, because the fact is that the groundwork for this bill has been in the making for decades, and it is only recently that an incredible coalition of Oregonians from across the political spectrum has come together to make it possible for us to propose this legislation.

As I touched on with Senator BARRASSO, in rural areas of the West, like Malheur County, there is often a feeling that people from thousands of miles away, particularly in DC, think that they somehow know better than rural citizens about what is good for those rural communities. I guess I would sum it up as: In rural areas, there is the sense that somehow, often, elites just look down on them; that nobody is listening; that people in power

consider them kind of simple cowboys who care little about saving land, air, and water.

Now, I have townhall meetings in every county in Oregon. I had 970 of them until earlier this spring when we couldn't do them in person due to the pandemic. So we started doing them virtually. I know from all of those townhall meetings that constituents in Eastern Oregon are actually working every day to try to propose common-sense, practical policies to preserve special places for their kids and their grandkids. They know that they are working for all Americans because all Americans own public lands. Eastern Oregonians believe—and I think it is a very powerful point—that nobody cares more about protecting Oregon's natural treasures than those who live every day in those communities and are always thinking about what the future is for their kids and their grandkids.

I will repeat that.

Folks in rural Oregon know that the land is public land, that it belongs to all Americans, and they know that their communities' futures depend on keeping the lands healthy and usable. The ranchers of Malheur County want to be active participants in improving and keeping the ecological health of our public lands, and with this legislation that we are discussing today, they will have a real shot at doing just that.

The fact is that, in some parts of the West, there have been bad actors who have abused the land for their own gain and flouted the law in a dangerous way. For example, in 2016, a heavily armed group of extremists that was not from Oregon, led by members of the Bundy family, stormed the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and occupied it for weeks. There was a standoff that people all over the country saw, between them and Federal, State, and local law enforcement. There was one death. Further south, in Nevada, the Bundys have not only stolen millions of dollars' worth of grazing fees from the American people, they also basically pushed aside basic environmental standards laid out by the Taylor Grazing Act, leading to degraded landscapes.

Now, in Malheur County, just a few hours of wide open spaces east of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge that the extremists took over, our ranchers and our small business people, to their great credit, said: We are going to take a different path, a better path. In Malheur County, you don't have the Bundys breaking the law. Our Malheur County ranchers are committed to being better and doing better, but that doesn't mean they aren't skeptical of people coming in and changing the rules when it comes to public lands surrounding their communities.

So, in 2018, the Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition from Malheur County came to Washington to meet with me. Senator BARRASSO will be interested in this. This group of ranchers and small

business people came to me with a very improbable request for a Democratic U.S. Senator: Would I be willing to work with them to pass land management legislation that could serve as an alternative to a designation as a national monument?

I thought this would be the point my colleagues would be interested in: I asked one member of the group if they had come to me because they thought I might take leave of my senses and say yes to their request. When I asked them, the person who was looking at me said: Yes, that is what we thought, Ron.

Looming over the discussion was the history of this wonderful part of Eastern Oregon. I am not going to take my colleagues through a long discussion of the history of the Taylor Grazing Act, as it goes all the way back to 1932. So I will just start with the fact that in this area, Malheur County makes up most of the Vale District of the Bureau of Land Management, which, of course, is part of the Department of the Interior. The Vale District was the poster child for "scientific grazing management" in the 1960s and early 1970s under the Taylor Grazing Act. Did it live up to its potential? I would say it didn't because its efforts really were not adequately funded, and it lacked the consistent monitoring or the adaptive management needed to make it work on the ground, and that raises the question: What results are really at issue?

The Taylor Grazing Act is about turning cattle out onto public lands and attempting to assure they don't destroy the land, but where is the act when it comes to fighting invasive weeds and actually improving soil health and responding to climate change and the effects of rangeland fires? In looking at what happened over the decades—the 1930s, the 1960s, the 1970s—this bill says we are going to answer those questions for 2020.

The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition from Malheur County wanted to work together. I was glad that they came with their improbable request. I said we have got one chance here on our watch to bring people together, to come up with a sensible proposal. And when they indicated they wanted to work with me, I basically said: How could I refuse?

Knowing the violence that can erupt in the West when people become closed off, when people just refuse to talk, that is when you have a prescription for trouble. As long as we are talking, as long as we are coming together, as long as we are sitting with each other and maybe just having a coffee, a tuna fish sandwich, you have an opportunity to come up with solutions. That is why I agreed to this.

I agreed, in effect, to try to match the courage of these ranchers and business people in coming forward, and I said: If they are going to be willing to think through how to do this, I am going to join them.

Now, the other area I want to touch on is—I said at the get-go and I think this has implications for dealing with public lands in the West. I said that there has got to be three requirements to help us all protect the land and preserve the ranching way of life.

First, we would have to bring everybody to the table—environmentalists, ranchers, local folks, and we would have to bring some of the folks from the more metropolitan area as well. That is because, in effect, when I said that, they said: OK. You know your way around legislation. We will try to find common ground.

And there is common ground on the key question. In every nook and cranny of Oregon, there are people who care about our natural treasures in the Owyhee Canyonlands. Malheur County may keep its clock on Idaho time, but it is enormously loved all across our State. In my view, that alone ought to be a reason, after decades and decades of differences with respect to how to manage these treasures, that alone is a reason to work together.

The second rule of our discussions was all about we weren't going to litigate this with the press and outside groups every time somebody had a little question, any kind of a dispute. So, in effect, we had set it up so that other groups, environmental and ranchers, there was going to be a lot of opportunity for folks to have their say.

And the third rule was that there would be an understanding that we would respect our environmental laws. That was also very pivotal. So, in March of 2019, we got our group together in the conference room at the National Guard Armory in Ontario, OR, and those were the things that we wanted to start with that we thought gave us a chance to build this coalition that could lead to passing legislation to manage these treasures. So we got ranchers, environmentalists, local businesses, and we meet, essentially, every other Monday for months and months.

I also want to thank the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Oregon State parks, fish and wildlife management agencies, local Tribe representatives, all of whom put in enormous amounts of time offering information, expertise, and good will. I met with local county officials, as well, relearning their thoughts with respect to roads and water infrastructure and their most important local economic needs. So that is what really led to this legislation.

Finally, what we said is that we have to make sure that people have an opportunity to also talk, sort of, a little bit offline. So after these sessions, we always found a way to make it to a gathering place somewhere where people could just have a soda, perhaps something a little bit stronger, and we could just take the time informally to talk about what we thought the future was for this incredible part of the world.

Now, in closing up, I want to mention that I think land designation discussions pit people against one another in the West if you do it the traditional sort of way. We needed some unity if we were going to come together on a bill. So that is why we wanted to make sure everybody had a shared understanding of how this would be addressed.

I particularly want at this time to commend Sarah Bittleman, who is sitting here with me, who, month after month after month, call after call after call, email after email after email, always tried to keep this on focus.

I also want to mention at this time our inspiration was the late Mary Gautreaux, who was in our office for over two decades. She was the spirit of this effort. She lived in Portland. Yet she was beloved—beloved—by the people of rural Oregon, the people of Malheur County. So with Sarah and Mary as the energy behind this, we really set out to build this coalition, which has gotten us to this point. It was a coalition driven on the fact that people would take the time to do this right.

When I brought it to the attention of Senator BARRASSO, who obviously will play a key role in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee next year, the first thing he wanted to hear about was the kind of groundwork that had been laid for local input, for local stakeholders. I described to him much of what we have been talking about.

So I introduced the Malheur CEO Act in November of 2019. It was part of a legislative hearing in 2020, and let me just very quickly describe a couple of elements of it. It works this way: It includes range land management enhancements, loop roads to focus tourist travel and build the local economy, and about a million acres of wilderness designation. It also moves around a million acres of land now being studied into multiple-use management.

The bill implements a few key strategies: a plan to let ranchers do range improvements, irrigation systems, removing water-sucking juniper, and replacing invasive weeds with native grasses and improve the ecological health of the range land.

So here are the pictures to my left. The first is a picture of rangeland being overrun by weeds. The second shows rangeland in a native, healthy condition.

Now, the bill also establishes a Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee advisory group so on an ongoing basis it can advise BLM on land management. And the bill also provides substantial funding for the BLM so it can finish environmental soil surveys and carry out environmental policies associated with this bill and monitor the implementation of the bill.

The bill includes funding for the study and designation of three loop roads designed to improve the visitor experience, keep visitors out of trouble, and drive more traffic to the small

retail businesses, which I think we all understand desperately—desperately—need our attention.

I also want to thank at this point, while I am on floor, Senator GRASSLEY. He and I have led the bipartisan effort on the Finance Committee.

I see Senator MANCHIN here. He knows how strongly we feel about getting the small businesses the deductibility associated with these PPP loans.

I bring this up only by way of saying that we are grateful to Senator GRASSLEY for working with me. He is the chair of the Finance Committee. I am the ranking Democrat, but Senator MANCHIN and others deserve credit for helping us get that proposal moving, and we made it clear we have to get that in before we go home. Part of it is our concern for the small retail businesses that we saw in the Owyhee.

Finally, the bill provides for amenities at the Owyhee Reservoir with a marina. That is also good for the local economy. Recreation is a big economic engine in our part of the world.

And the last point I will just mention is the bill is a compromise. Everybody had to make some concessions.

There are folks who feel that the environmental groups got too much here. There are folks who feel the ranchers and the small business people got too much. But the fact is, all sides said: We have some core values and some core priorities. Let's see if we can address the core values and core priorities on both sides of this so that this spectacular portion of Eastern Oregon could be protected and preserved and we could respect and empower the people who call it home and work so hard to make a living there.

Finally, I ask unanimous consent to put into the RECORD the names of all the people who worked so hard on this effort—our Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition. They are ranchers; there are folks on various kinds of environmental organizations and groups; and they deserve incredible credit for being willing to put in the time and effort on something that seemed so improbable.

Finally, I want to thank my partner here in the Senate, Senator MERKLEY. He has been terrific as we worked on this. We both share a love of the land in Eastern Oregon.

Now it is up to the U.S. Senate to get this passed. It isn't going to happen today, unfortunately, but I want the Senate to know I am going to stay at it until this gets done. I think it will be of enormous benefit for rural Oregon. I think it will be of enormous benefit for our State, and I think it will be a model for how our country brings people together, particularly as it relates to issues where we have been polarized in the past.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

The Owyhee Basin Stewardship Coalition members who sat through most of the meetings:

Steve Russell, chair/rancher
Andy Bentz, former sheriff and Cliff Bentz's brother
Linda Bentz, rancher and Cliff and Andy's sister-in-law
Elias Eiguren, rancher
Mark Mackenzie, rancher
Jaime Yturriondobeitia, rancher
Paulette Pyle, local consultant and former advocate

And members of the environmental community who also sat through all or most of the meetings that lead to S. 2828

Tim Davis, Friends of the Owyhee
Ryan Houston and Corie Harlan, Oregon Natural Desert Association

David Moryc, American Rivers
Nicole Cordan, Pew Charitable Trust
Liz Sullivan, Northwest Sports Fishermen
With special thanks to Brent Grasty and Don Gonzalez at the Bureau of Land Management without whose expertise many of our discussions would have been a lot shorter.

Mr. WYDEN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I would like permission to basically be able to complete my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MANCHIN. Mr. President, I want to start by thanking all of the Members—and I mean all of the Members—who have worked so diligently to produce this product.

This is the product we produced with the so-called Gang of 8, but it turned into a bigger gang than that because more and more people want to work in a bipartisan way in the Senate. I have said: It is alive and well; we just have to exercise it more.

We did that. We brought over the bicameral group, the Problem Solvers, and they were tremendously instrumental in being involved in this process. I am so pleased to have that bicameral work, bipartisan work. We need more of it, and we are going to basically demand more of it. But with this product right now, as the "four corners" are working, this is the template they have used.

Leader SCHUMER has said that this is what they have used because the legislative language has already been produced. There might be some tweaks to it, but there are so many people.

Let me tell you how it started. My dear friend Senator DURBIN is here. After the election, we called each other back and forth, a few of us, saying: Something has to be done. Nothing is moving. People are hurting.

We heard that all during the election, and they couldn't figure out why we hadn't done anything. I had no good explanation because, basically, the two leaders on both sides of the aisle were locked, and I said we didn't know how to break it. The only way we could break it is by doing something showing we could come together.

We did that. We did that in a way that—we had a dinner. Senator MARK WARNER from Virginia said: Let's have a dinner. Senator LISA MURKOWSKI said: Come to my house. So we go to